Population Health Congress 2012

Population Health in a Changing World

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TITLE: Choosing cost effective technologies to sustain the "longevity" of longitudinal studies.

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Introduction:

Longitudinal population-based studies, such as the Mater-University Study of Pregnancy (MUSP), face the prospect of irregular funding and a stop-start funding cycle. These projects typically face years of no funding followed by a few years of grant success. Longitudinal studies need to develop management strategies to sustain their long term viability, relevance and efficacy through irregular funding cycles. The principal task of longitudinal studies is the collection of data of high integrity, from which knowledge is extracted and disseminated through publication.

Methods:

An appropriate information management strategy is therefore central. Within the information strategy, the key issue of 'which software tools are used' to optimise resources is often neglected. In this presentation we will report on how MUSP has successfully employed 'standard off the shelf' follow-up software to track the collection and input of follow-up data for this 30 year prospective study.

Progress:

Use of the software has improved the efficiency of the follow-up processes during an expansion of the study. As such, bespoke software tools have been replaced with standard commercial software adapted for research purposes. The pros and cons, and research implications will be discussed.

Conclusion:

The follow-up tool used has aided the ability of MUSP to easily collect and access a wealth of information regarding follow-up status and participant tracking. It has improved the capacity of MUSP to store participant contact information, track changes in participant details over time, and better identify factors associated with loss to follow-up.

Key message:

Expertise in information management applications and their relevance to survey studies, longitudinal or not, should become a core competency within teams conducting public health research.